# CITY OF LYNCHBURG

## Department of Communications & Marketing
## Review of Citizens First - Suite Response Service

Prepared by the Department of Internal Audit
November 22, 2004

# *Introduction*

In July of 1997, the City established a Customer Service Leadership Team "to select, customize and implement an effective, efficient computer software system that communicates code enforcement and other related information between municipal personnel to enhance the quality of service to our customers."  The team was a result of the newly formed Code Enforcement Task Force.  Each code enforcement division shared the concern that code enforcement complaints and other citizen concerns were not always promptly addressed due to poor communications.

This initiative resulted in Citizens First, a one-stop citizen assistance office, and the Suite Response Service system.  Citizens First was originally assigned to the Department of Communications and Marketing, but was reassigned to the Assistant City Manager when a Quality Services Coordinator position was established.  When the Assistant City Manager position was vacated, the office was assigned to the City Manager.  It has recently been reassigned to Communications and Marketing and the Quality Services Coordinator position has been eliminated.

Suite Response is a management system that enables users to add, track and respond to citizens' complaints, requests, concerns and compliments.  Users of the system are members of one of four groups.  The first group consists of the Customer Service Representatives (CSR's) who are the front line support.  In the City's case, the CSR's are a part of Citizens First.   The persons responsible for responding to Citizens' concerns are the Assignees who make up the second group.  Department managers who oversee the assignees are the third group, and the Service Administrators are the fourth group of users.

There are five CSR's in Citizens First who enter the issues to the Suite Response system from the 856-CITY telephone calls and walk-in requests.  The specific issue types selected upon entry are linked to appropriate assignees and others who will receive the information.  Once the data is entered, the system sends emails to those designated users.  The issue format is designed to allow the assignees to document actions taken toward resolving the issues and close them once they are resolved.  Most of the issues are available to anyone in the City.  Certain issues, such as those assigned to Social Services, can be tagged as confidential and may only be viewed by restricted personnel.

This audit was performed as a regularly scheduled audit with the approval of the Audit Committee.

## *Review Objectives*

The objectives of the review of the Suite Response Service System were to determine that:

> ➤ Calls are accurately recorded;
> ➤ Responses are appropriate and timely;
> ➤ Information is appropriately categorized;
> ➤ Complaints/requests are monitored; and
> ➤ System reports and data are used to enhance operations.

## *Scope of Work*

A sample of open issues on the Suite Response system, created prior to August 1, 2004, were scheduled and tested for timely responses, accurate category of issue and assignee and appropriateness of disposition.  Questionnaires were sent to City departments to gather information on the extent of use, whether response time goals are established and monitored, how the information is used and whether the issue information is entered to another system. Interviews were also conducted with nine divisions that receive large numbers of issues and with technical support personnel in the Department of Information Technology.

The audit was conducted in accordance with auditing standards governing performance audits and, accordingly, included such tests of records and other audit procedures as were considered necessary in the circumstances.

The Internal Audit Department is free from organizational impairments to independence in our reporting as defined by government auditing standards.  We report directly to an audit committee and, administratively to the city manager and are organizationally outside the staff or line management function of the areas we audit.

## *Audit Conclusions*

Based on the work performed, we conclude that:

> ➤ Calls are accurately recorded on the Suite Response System;
> ➤ Responses are frequently untimely;
> ➤ There are no actions recorded for many issues;
> ➤ Information is appropriately categorized;
> ➤ Response times are not established for all users;
> ➤ Not all response times are monitored; and
> ➤ System reports are currently unavailable.

# *Observations*

The following observations illustrate the inconsistencies among the City departments in their use of the Suite Response System. Three Public Works divisions use the system as their primary source for receiving and monitoring citizen complaints and requests. These divisions - Waste Management, Streets & Construction and Utilities - receive the majority of complaints and requests handled by the Customer Service Representatives (CSR's).

I. Open Issues

We tested 42 of 266 open issues and noted:

- ➢ For 19 (45%) issues, assignees did not enter any responses or actions;
- ➢ Responses were not timely for four (4) of the remaining 23 issues;
- ➢ Work orders were issued for 3 issues, but the status was not changed to "scheduled"; and
- ➢ Nine (9) issues indicated that partial action had been taken. Three (3) should have been placed in "pending" status and 2 had been completed and should have been closed.

In order for the Suite Response System to be effective, assignees should indicate intended action or action already taken under the "Actions Taken" section of the issue. When work orders are issued, the status of the issue should be changed to "scheduled". If action has been taken, but the work is not completed, a "pending" status should be shown and completed issues should be closed by the assignee or designated employee.

One of the objectives of the city's Customer Service Policy is to "deliver timely, efficient and effective services" by addressing "all customer inquiries, concerns, complaints and issues in a timely manner".

Citizens First employees often receive follow-up calls from citizens regarding earlier complaints and issues. If assignees do not enter action or status information on the system, the CSR's cannot assist those callers. Additionally, issues remain on the system indefinitely if assignees do not close them. This results in inaccurate information and incorrect numbers of open and closed issues.

II. Established Goals

Twenty (20) user departments/divisions completed questionnaires which asked specific questions related to their use of the Suite Response system. Results indicated that 16 of the 20 users have established response time goals; however only 12 of them monitor the response times. Only one of the divisions that we interviewed uses the system data to measure performance.

Normally, standards of use are established for systems such as Suite Response in order to obtain consistency within an organization. The city's Customer Service Policy states that "Performance shall be continually measured and benchmarked against best business practices".

Several of the departments/divisions that we interviewed indicated that the response times were unrealistic. Response time does not indicate when the issue is to be resolved, but only when it is initially addressed. There are also established resolution time goals for each type of issue that users may be confusing with the response time goals.

 III. Issue Monitoring

During the test work, we noticed that one inspector entered a "will inspect" in the "Actions Taken" section of each issue received on Suite Response and closed out the issue. According to management in the area, the inspectors are in the field all day and find that it is burdensome to access each issue and enter the dates of inspections and actions taken. Therefore, the system does not capture response times or actions related to the issues.

If the issues are closed when received, there is no system record of the inspections. Although this user department has established goals and the questionnaire response indicates that the response times are monitored, there are no records on Suite Response of actual performances.

Suite Response was implemented to ensure that all issues are adequately addressed within reasonable response time. Inspection dates should be entered to the system with an explanation of the disposition or actions taken.

IV. Use of Other Systems

Six of the 20 questionnaires completed indicated that the issue information in Suite Response is also entered into other systems. The Public Works divisions of Waste Management and Traffic Engineering enter information to data bases designed to capture specific information that they can not obtain from Suite Response. Building Maintenance and Grounds enter the information to their Work Management system, and the Division of Forestry enters service information into the Tree Manager system that maintains the City's tree inventory. The Tree Manager also gathers financial information that is used to pay contractors for outsourced work.

For most of the issues entered to another system, no information is entered to Suite Response. Some areas close the issues on Suite Response when they are resolved; however, there is no record of actions taken. Community Planning and Development, Housing Inspectors enter issue information and follow up actions to their TrakIt system and reference the TrakIt assigned case number on the Suite Response system. This allows CSR's and other users to access information using the TrakIt case number.

One reason for the use of other systems is the inability to run reports from the Suite Response system. The reporting function of Suite Response works through an extension to Crystal Reports. Many of the users have not been trained on Crystal Reports and do not have the software installed on their computers. The current option for producing reports is exporting the data to an Excel spreadsheet and extracting the data needed into another spreadsheet.

## V. Recording Non-Issues

The CSR's enter non-issue calls/walk-in inquiries to the Suite Response system. Of 108,151 entries between January 2002 and October 22, 2004, over 67,000 were made for non-issue incidents. They included such things as call transfers, wrong numbers, requests for phone numbers and walk-in inquiries for directions and other information. The non-issue items are also linked to departments in the system, if applicable.

According to staff, this information has been entered since the City purchased the software. The general explanation is that management wanted to know how many citizens were served by Citizens First, both calls and walk-ins.

When non-issues are entered and linked to departments, the actual number of issues associated with action needed/taken by the departments is skewed and not reliable. In addition, entering non action issues creates added work for the staff in Citizens First.

Some issues are entered to the system for information only. We noted 4 such entries during our test work. One issue was forwarded within the police department with a note, "FYI, no complainant". This issue was not closed by the recipient. Three entries were made for road closings and assigned to one of the CSR's. Citizens First received two of the closings from construction companies under City contracts. One of these was received on 5/18/04 and noted the road would be closed "for about two weeks for the CSO project". The other issue was received on 3/23/04 for a closing "24 hours a day until further notice." The issues were still open on 9/27/04.

According to the Director of Communications and Marketing, the road closing information that is entered to Suite Response is used for press releases and other means of communication to inform citizens.

A dependency on outside contractors to notify CSR's when roads are reopened places the assignee in a non-accountable position. Further, these issues do not require action or resolution.

## VI. System Administration

There is no System Administrator for the Suite Response system. Prior to the position being eliminated, the Quality Services Coordinator assisted employees with the system

and provided reports when requested.  The Department of Information Technology provides technical support, but no one has been assigned as Administrator.

The Systems Administrator position is a vital part of system security and data integrity and has the ability to work with users to provide information they are unable to obtain. Administrators for purchased software have regular contact with the vendor regarding problems, changes, modifications and upgrades.  Additionally, these positions are more likely to establish a link to other users and their experiences which can benefit the City.

Currently, knowledge of the software's capabilities is limited and users are not being properly trained and supported.

VII. <u>Non-utilized Suite Response Tools</u>

Suite Response offers functions that are not being utilized by the City.  One of these is the "nag engine" which sends reminders to assignees who have made no response to an issue when the response date has elapsed.  Reminders continue to be sent until action is taken.  The system also produces a "hot list" of old unaddressed issues for management's review.

Additional features include the ability to produce work orders directly from the issue information and to write letters related to issues.  Waste Management is the only area we found that is using the system work orders.  To our knowledge, no one uses the letter writing capability.

Departments prepared the response times for issues when the system was implemented. These were representative of the expectations of management.  The "nag engine" helps evaluate the timeliness of the responses and assists management with performance evaluations.  The "hot list" is used to allow departments to clean up outstanding issues. Two of the departments interviewed stated that they would like to continue to receive them.

Currently, when actions are not entered or statuses are not changed, there is no reminder to assignees or other employees who are copied on the issue.  Issues may go unaddressed indefinitely.

VIII. <u>Excessive Number of Issue Types</u>

Employees from 4 of the 9 divisions with which we held interviews felt there were too many issue types established in the Suite Response system.  There appears to be redundancy in some of the areas, such as "signs".  According to personnel in Public Works - Street Division, there are separate issue types for the different types of signs. The type of sign is not a relevant factor in assignment of the issues.  Excessive issue types create more confusion and may result in sending issues to the wrong assignee. During our testing we found numerous transfers of issues between divisions due to the selection of wrong issue types.

Initially, departments were instructed to provide lists of all of the issues addressed by their employees; however, it is our understanding that new issue types may be added at any time.

IX. <u>System Not Utilized By All Employees</u>

According to those employees who were originally involved with the process, the system was intended to be used city-wide. There are many employees who are not entering information to the system when they receive complaints or requests. Instead, most refer citizens to Citizens First or transfer the calls. Some employees are not aware that they have access and most have never received training on how to use the system.

Additionally, some departments receive direct complaints, requests, etc. that they are not entering to Suite Response. Therefore, information on those not entered is unavailable to management, the CSR's and others who may receive follow-up calls.

## *Suggestions*

Based on the inconsistencies in usage of the Suite Response system as a customer service tool, we suggest that Council and management determine if the current practices are acceptable, or if consistent city-wide use of the system is preferred.

The establishment of Citizens First and the implementation of the Suite Response system have greatly reduced the number of unanswered calls and unaddressed issues and have improved the coordination of responses from departments on issues requiring input from various programs. However "the ability to have continuous measures and improvements" is not realized. Current practices result in incomplete or inaccurate information regarding the number of open and closed issues and actions taken toward resolving the issues.

Full utilization of the Suite Response system would require:

- A determination of the issues/calls to be tracked;
- Accurate and complete responses from users regarding actions taken;
- Appropriate status entries and changes;
- Establishment of realistic response and resolved time goals;
- Appropriate monitoring by supervisory personnel;
- Appointment of a system administrator;
- Use of all system tools, including report capability;
- Interfacing with or eliminating other systems, where possible;
- A review of the issue types; and
- Training for all employees who receive citizen calls.

## *Other Comments*

We appreciate the assistance of all the employees who took the time to complete questionnaires and meet with us to discuss their use of the Suite Response system.  We also thank the Director of Communications and Marketing and the CSR's in Citizens First for their valuable input.  We are available to discuss this report should questions arise.

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Carol J. Bibb, Director of Internal Audit

## Departments Interviewed

<u>Meetings were held with the following:</u>

Social Services
Community Planning - Neighborhood Services
Public Works - Waste Management
Public Works - Streets & Traffic
Public Works - Utilities
Public Works - Traffic Engineering
Public Works - Buildings & Grounds
GLTC
Information Technology (System Technical Support)

<u>Phone Conversations were made to:</u>

Police Department - Crime Prevention
Information Technology - Cable T.V.
Parks and Recreation

## Departments Completing Questionnaires

Human Services
Community Planning - Neighborhood Services
Community Planning - Housing Inspections ( 2 questionnaires)
Public Works - Waste Management
Public Works - Streets (6 questionnaires)
Public Works - Engineering
Public Works - Administration
Public Works - Buildings & Grounds (4 questionnaires)
Public Works - Utilities
Police (3 questionnaires)
Parks and Recreation
Assessor
Library
City Attorney
Commissioner of the Revenue
Information Technology
Human Resources (Do not use system)
Fire (Do not use system)

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